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Final Report

Nine Issues Concerning USAID's New OPS System: How Recent Institutional Experiences Within the U.S. Military Might Point to Some Useful Solutions

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Introduction

Purpose of the report

This report was produced by The CNA Corporation for the Natural Resources Management Unit of the Division of Productive Sector Growth and Environment in the Office of Sustainable Development, Africa Bureau, United States Agency for International Development (NRM/PSGE/SD/ AFR/USAID). This work was conducted under a Fixed-Price Purchase Order agreement as part of the extant Environmental Planning and Management Project operated under USAID Global Bureau's Center for the Environment.

The report constitutes the final deliverable under the Purchase Order, identified in the Statement of Work as the "final report listing key issues/ approaches which the USAID operations [OPS] system needs to consider in order to learn best practices elsewhere in the USG of relevance to USAID's mandate and operational realities."

This report is written for USAID personnel and partners familiar with the detailed workings of the new OPS system as defined by:

- The final report of the USAID Business Area Analysis Team for Operations, entitled *Making a Difference for Development: Reengineering the U.S. Agency for International Development's Program Operations*
- The Automated Directives Series concerning the new OPS system
- The internal debates about various aspects of the new OPS system as captured in the USAID Reengineering newsletter *On Track, as well as the Internet-based discussion groups known as the Results Framework Network (RFNET) and the Results Framework Technical Network (RFTechNet).*

Format of the report

The report focuses on nine separate issues concerning USAID's new OPS system. Each issue is presented in the following format:

- Observation—Describes one troubling or disputed aspect of the new OPS system.
- Analogous discussion—Relates the observation to a similar institutional experience faced by some part of the U.S. military in its recent past.
- Recommendation—Unites the observation and analogy into a concrete step USAID might consider in dealing with the identified issuue.

Issue 1—An appropriate focus on host-country endstates

Observation

USAID's Sustainable Development strategy concentrates attention and resources on those host countries it considers best bets to offer a strong development return on the investment made, while taking a tougher line on those nations where success is seen as unachievable in terms of sustainability. In other words, USAID's new focus on results is predicated on picking "winners" and avoiding "sinkholes." The new OPS system works implicitly toward identifying opportunities to maximize USAID's development investments by fostering programmatic flexibility within Strategic Objectives (i.e., the funding should follow, or flow toward, successes).

Taken a logical step further, USAID's new results orientation implies a time limit on any mission's efforts within a host country (i.e., a foreign aid equivalent to domestic welfare reform). Success must be occurring; otherwise, the money should flow elsewhere, and, presumably, the mission would ultimately close out its operations. If success is occurring, more funding should flow to speed up the process. If the process is sped up, an endstate can and must be reached whereupon country graduation can occur. If one closes the loop on this logic, all missions should have, as part of their strategic planning, a clear and unambiguous definition of what such a successfully achieved endstate should look like. Planning for results means planning for success, and planning for success means graduation by some reasonable length of time.

Analogous discussion

Since the end of the Cold War (and really since the Korean War), U.S. decision-makers have had to adjust to the American public's desire to limit the length of any intervention overseas (much like they increasingly voice worries about a "never-ending" flow of aid to countries that never

seem to advance as a result).[1] This view is commonly described in terms of "avoiding another Vietnam," or "avoiding a quagmire." Vietnam, then, is viewed as the worst historical example of a military "sinkhole," i.e., an intervention that was essentially unwinnable regardless of the resources poured into it. Countering that example is the Persian Gulf War, seen as the best example of the U.S. military's being given clear objectives and sufficient resources to go into the situation, achieving the limited objective, and then rather quickly pulling out.

The military's strong focus on limiting the duration of any overseas intervention to its barest minimum is seen in the emphasis it places on defining, a priori, the endstate conditions necessary to end the campaign. This endstate definition is easily the most contentious and highlighted aspect of the exhaustive pre-campaign planning that occurs between the Unified Military Commands around the world that will conduct the campaign directly and the Joint Staff back in the Pentagon that has overall management of operations. The agreements they reach are analogous to those achieved between USAID missions and USAID/Washington (USAID/W) in that nothing can occur until both agree and permission is granted by headquarters. Once that permission is given, control over operations resides largely in the hands of the Unified Commander on the scene. Many in the military view this pre-campaign planning process as being so complicated and involved that, in comparison, actually promulgating the operations often appears more straightforward (as paradoxical as that sounds). Thus the phrase, "Crisis is hard, war is easy" (i.e., planning is hard, execution is easier).

Again, the most difficult aspect of this pre-campaign planning involves the definition of the endstate necessary before operations can cease and troops can withdraw. This process is made all the more difficult and contentious by the new types of interventions the U.S. military has been asked to perform since the end of the Cold War. Unlike the more traditional military operations that focus on the destruction of opposing forces, increasingly the U.S. Armed Forces are being

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[1] Forty-seven percent of respondents to a recent *Washington Post survey of voters' concerns said they were worried that "more and more countries will come begging the United States for economic help, and we'll neglect the people who need help at home" as a result. This response registered as the 18th most prominent concern, with the number one concern (U.S. education system will get worse) being cited by sixty-two percent of the respondents. See Mario A. Brossard and Richard Morin, "American Voters Focus on Worries Close to Home," The Washington Post, 15 September 1996.*

asked to go into so-called failed states to help reestablish the minimal conditions of order necessary for the host country government and in-country private voluntary organizations and non-government organizations to be able to pursue their normal operations (e.g., after a natural disaster, or upon social chaos created by internal warfare).

Much like USAID, then, the U.S. military is increasingly forced into thinking about and defining those obstacles to the normal social, political, and economic functioning of a country that must be removed before ending U.S. military operations there (and likewise how best to cooperate with other nations' militaries in such efforts). Clearly, the military focuses its attention on the more basic end of the spectrum than do USAID missions (to jump to a medical analogy, the military's focus is more like that of emergency room personnel), but the focus on the definition of and the step-by-step elimination of obstacles to the eventual cessation of U.S. in-country operations is essentially the same, as are the profound conceptual and practical difficulties in planning and achieving such a progression.

But what's most instructive here is the military's zealous concentration on the achievement of the endstate. It infuses all of its planning and execution; it provides a strong institutional focus from top to bottom; and it illuminates every aspect of its in-operations monitoring and evaluation of success (by asking the question over and over again, "Does this activity move us closer to the endstate?"). The military believes that the longer it remains in any intervention, the more likely that "mission creep" will occur, i.e., it will be drawn increasingly into activities that are superfluous or, even worse, counterproductive to the achievement of endstate. In short, the mission will be modified beyond its original intent and, worst of all, extended.

Recommendation

Like the military's endstate planning, USAID missions are inherently in the business of "developing themselves out of business." To do this, missions need explicitly defined endstates that point to those minimum enabling conditions necessary to allow the host country's successful graduation. Since Results Frameworks (RFs) are limited to a 5- to 8-year time frame, such an endstate definition may well require a lengthier planning horizon— say 10 to 15 years, with the continued tracking of results not being limited to the point of graduation. Investments made

within the mission's existence should continue to bear fruit far beyond the pullout date, and these successes should be captured for both public accountability and public relations.

To say such an additional horizon only increases the planning requirements of missions already overburdened with the same misses the point. An 8-year RF that operates within, say, a 12-year endstate deadline and is not explicitly linked to any endstate or graduation strategy is very disjointed planning indeed, with disruption of the mission's operating focus the most likely outcome. Likewise, to say that such an endstate focus forces a cruel and unfair deadline on countries struggling to develop misses the larger point of the Sustainable Development philosophy—development is real only if it is sustainable, and sustainability is real only after country graduation and USAID's departure.

Issue 2—Strategic Objectives operating in vacuums: The evils of stovepiping

Observation

USAID's overarching strategy of Sustainable Development is centered on the idea that fostering positive synergy among four identified pillars— democracy, the environment, economic development, and health/ population—is the essential element of successful aid. Sustainability is an illusion unless the development encouraged cuts across these four sectors and builds mutually reinforcing bonds among them. In short, it is either "one for all and all for one," or nothing of lasting value is likely to be achieved. For example, the most important successes to be achieved in democracy and governance are those that trigger related successes in the other three sectors. A success in democracy and governance that is not traceable, in terms of impact, to related successes in the other three sectors would be of far lesser value, because that success itself could not be sustained, i.e., democracy will fail without progress in the other areas.

Having said that, where is the evidence that missions are planning Results Frameworks for individual Strategic Objectives (SOs) that explicitly and consistently seek to define or prove causal linkages across SOs, or across sectors, or even simply seek out evidence of positive cross-sectoral impact in terms of monitoring and evaluation? For example, both natural resources management and democracy and governance activities often overlap on the issue of empowering local populations toward more control over their local environs. Are the RFs being drawn up in these two sectors being crafted in such a way as to explore the obvious overlap? Are measures of effectiveness and impact employed in each SO's Results Packages ever directed outward toward the other sector? Or are these sensors always pointed inwards, capturing impact only within that SO? Within that sector? The new OPS system was designed to break down barriers not only within sectors, but across them as well. Within USAID, there seems some genuine agreement that stovepiping by functional offices has decreased dramatically under the new OPS system, but can

the same be said across developmental sectors—not just in terms of meetings attended, but in terms of RFs created, SOT operations, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems defined?

Analogous discussion

The U.S. military comprises four services: the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps. During the Cold War era, each service focused the bulk of its planning and training on defending against its Soviet counterpart service. Cooperation among the four U.S. military services was rather minimal (mostly centered around transportation, logistics, or deconfliction, i.e., avoiding fratricide), as each strove over the years to make itself as self-sufficient as possible. Not surprisingly, this approach led to substantial duplication of effort, but, as long as the Soviet threat continued, such overlap was considered a useful margin of safety. In matters of basic security, redundancy can be a good thing.

With the decrease and eventual cessation of the Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union, however, came a new way of thinking within the Defense Department. No longer a matter of life-and-death competition with the Soviets, national security funding came under far greater scrutiny, and, with it, so too did these substantial overlaps in service capabilities. In place of the old services' drive for self-sufficiency, i.e., separate missions in separate environments, the Defense Department began pushing the concept of "jointness," meaning the most effective and efficient way to combine service capabilities in any substantial military operation. This concept had essentially lay dormant since it was effectively written into law in the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. Naturally, the services continued to resist such integration, and a substantial period of time (from the mid 1980s until the mid 1990s, one could argue) was required for this approach to gain enough momentum throughout the Defense Department for the individual services to reorient their personnel management systems (i.e., promotions) to both encourage and reward individuals toward (and for) career paths considered "purple." (Purple is seen as the color reflective of jointness in the same way that green is considered emblematic of the Army, light blue for the Air Force, and so on.)

Over the past five years, the institutional maturation of the concept of jointness has spread throughout the areas of doctrine, training, planning, and operations. The pervasiveness of the

jointness concept is now seen in how each service increasingly defines success in terms of how it enables the other services to do their jobs better. Each service still retains unique functions that are "self-enabling," i.e., they allow the individual service to perform a function with little need for help from other services. However, the further you go up the military services' equivalent of a Results Framework (i.e., from the rearmost activity all the way up to those implemented on the front lines of operations), the more you see success and measures of effectiveness defined in terms of what this or that capability does to augment or enable the capability of the other three services, and vice versa.

This synergy is crucial because the military has increasingly come to realize that any one service trying to mount its own campaigns is largely self-limiting, inefficient, and therefore unsustainable unless it provides enabling conditions for the other services as well, and is, in turn, enabled by them. All four services are seen as integral to a successful military operation. Anything less and the U.S. public simply isn't getting its money's worth.

Recommendation

A USAID doctrinal equivalent of "jointness" needs to emerge to link the new OPS system with the underlying logic of Sustainable Development. This doctrine needs to encourage, to the fullest extent feasible, Results Packages, Results Frameworks, and Strategic Objectives across sectors. This linking must occur most prominently in terms of monitoring and evaluation. If positive cross-sectoral spillovers cannot be identified within individual RFs, how can it be assumed that any such sustainability is being achieved across the SOs pursued by any one mission? In other words, Sustainable Development cannot be some hoped-for effect that is measurable only far downstream. If it can't be identified within an individual SO throughout most of the corresponding RF's "lifetime," it is probably not occurring.

Issue 3—Congressional oversight and funding by Strategic Objective: Why such a lack of trust?

Observation

A fundamental tenet of the new OPS system is that the flow of funding—at least below the level of the mission's Strategic Objectives—will be essentially demand-led. In other words, the money chases developmental "demand" within the host country. Wherever USAID successes occur, that is where more money should flow most over the lifetime of the Results Framework, and, conversely, wherever USAID experiences failures, that is where the money should dry up. In the demand-led funding stream, the money should flow toward developmental opportunities as they arise and are identified, much like investment follows business opportunities in a free-market economy.

For this aspect of the new OPS system to function correctly, Results Packages cannot be fixed units with lives of their own like the old USAID programs. RPs must rise and fall according to local demand, and not according to some arbitrary supply-led logic imposed from on high, be it either USAID-Washington or Congress. This means that, at the very least, obligation by SO must be the norm, so SO Teams can shift funds as needed in midstream to meet the local market's changing demand. This is the essence of the adaptive planning paradigm—contracting functions being decentralized to the level of local personnel operating on the front lines— that must permeate the new OPS system.

But what if Congress won't go along? Naturally, a certain amount of earmarking will continue. Few within USAID will argue that funding across the agency's major parts will be decided according to a demand-led approach (i.e., above the level of the missions, the game still remains far too political for that), but if Congress refuses to let missions obligate by SO and thus control

their investment strategies directly, does the new system fail as a whole? In other words, if USAID's top management finesses this issue with Congress in such a way that funding remains fixed at the old program/ new Results Packages level, has the agency simply triggered the Thermidor—or counter-revolution—that stops this long-running organizational revolution in its tracks? Has it unwittingly succumbed to a fatal flaw that ultimately renders Results-Oriented Operations Reengineering (ROOR) impotent in terms of sustainable change? Is this nothing less than the "fat lady singing" for ROOR?

Analogous discussion

The rise of the information age fundamentally transformed military warfare, but some types of militaries adapted to this revolution better than others. It used to be said that "he who moves stuff around the fastest wins." In other words, the ability to move troops, weapons, and ammunition around the battlefield faster than your opponent does was seen as the surest route to victory. Now, with the information revolution, many military experts amend that old aphorism thusly: "He who moves information around the fastest wins." This doesn't mean it doesn't still come down to troops in the field and bombs on targets, but rather that—all things being equal—the surest route to victory nowadays is thought to be managing information better than your opponent does.

The most effective way for militaries to take advantage of this information revolution in warfare is to decentralize the command-and-control function[2] to the greatest extent possible. All this high-tech information flow is rather useless in terms of speed unless it is delivered quickly to personnel on the front lines with both their fingers on the trigger and the authority to pull those triggers as indicated by the battlefield data as it pours in. If this information flow has to travel up and down some lengthy and unwieldy chain of command, the advantage of speed is lost. Although some might intuitively believe that a faster and broader information flow should allow for more layers of administrative oversight, the obverse is actually true if you're talking about

[2] Command and control being analogous to the delegation of decision-making responsibility within USAID.

taking advantage of the decision "speed" offered by this rapid information flow so as to make adaptive planning a reality. A better and faster information flow should afford greater confidence in the frontline troops' capacity for making the right call. Otherwise, this information revolution has only created more paperwork and additional decision bottlenecks. Personnel on the front lines must be trusted to make the right decisions, be empowered, and have the authority to exploit opportunities as they arise in the heat of the battle.

Armies of democratic countries are more adept at adjusting to this fundamental challenge of the information revolution than those of non-democratic states. They're more willing to decentralize military authority. Many military experts believe the real reason the United States has the finest military in the world is that the people accept the challenge of empowerment forced upon the institution as a whole by the information age. An average noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Armed Forces typically has greater command-and-control authority in the battlefield than most countries' generals, and especially more so than generals of militaries in authoritarian or totalitarian regimes where real authority is concentrated in the hands of a small, elite leadership.

The U.S. Armed Forces can trust its own people much more than the militaries of less-democratic nations can, primarily because of their training, but doctrine, or the military's corporate body of knowledge concerning "best practices," is the ultimate reason. Probably the most important of these best practices is the ability to discern those situations where an individual—no matter where he or she is in the chain of command—needs to take the matter in hand and make a "command decision." This doctrine of best practices, especially those involving when and how to make decisions in the field, is drilled into all military personnel throughout their careers. However, the even more important translation of these best practices into operational reality comes in the specific rules of engagement that the military draws up every time it prepares for a campaign or operation. These guidelines, known as ROE, define basic rules of thumb that all military personnel are to use as a reasoning framework for tactical decisions they will be forced to make in the field at a moment's notice. These ROE are typically printed on cards for distribution to before operations begin.

Creating these ROE for every operation is an operation in and of itself—one fraught with a plethora of politically sensitive questions that often involve a wide range of policy-makers from across the U.S. Government. These policy-makers fight it out during the delineation of these

ROE, but once these ROE are signed off by all the concerned political masters back in Washington and handed back over to the Unified Commander-in-Chief (CINC) of all forces within the region (who, with his staff, typically generated the bulk of the draft ROE guidelines in the first place), control over the employment of these ROE is likewise handed over to the Unified CINC (although "tweaking" of the ROE by political masters is a constant). This individual, armed with his overarching campaign plan[3] that was similarly hashed out with the political leadership back in Washington, is then essentially in control over the day-to-day issues of implementation through his oversight of his subordinate unified commander on scene at the crisis. The "big picture" of the campaign plan tells him what his Washington superiors expect of him in general, but within that framework he is relatively free to alter his tactics as required by the situation in the field—as are many of his subordinates out in the field leading the rank-and-file troops.

These subordinate commanders have their own delineated responsibilities and goals that are linked to one another through the causal logic of the campaign plan, and they can't alter their respective objectives without checking with the next-level commander above them. But as far as achieving results within their respective tasks, which can be thought of as equivalents to Results Packages, they are allowed a significant degree of operational freedom of action.

On the face of it, this setup of tactical freedom within operating units sounds like a recipe for chaos and disaster, especially in an event as complicated, uncertain, and prone to unforeseen snafus as a military campaign. So how does it all hold together? Again, the proximate answer is training, while the ultimate answer is the general doctrine and specific rules of engagement that define tactical "best practices."

If not for the careful and consistent employment of general military doctrine and specific ROE for individual operations, it is likely that the military would find itself subjected to the same kind of micro-managing oversight from U.S. political leaders as USAID often receives from Congress. USAID clearly faces political and strategic challenges as complex, or even more complex, as those faced by the military in any overseas intervention, yet one could argue that it often enjoys

[3] This plan outlines the basic approach of the military operation and is a rough operational equivalent to a Results Framework for any one SO.

less freedom of action in the field than the military does—even after both have hammered out detailed agreements with their political masters concerning the goals and operational approaches to be employed (i.e., the SO with accompanying RF and the campaign plan, respectively).

Is it because USAID's efforts cost more? Hardly. Is it because USAID'S potential failures are more damaging? Again, hardly. Is it because USAID's activities unfold at a far slower rate and thus invite micro-managing? Perhaps, but doesn't that slower pace of action also suggest less danger in allowing USAID personnel on the front lines greater freedom of action? And doesn't the potentially long-lasting and profound legacies of USAID activities likewise suggest a need for greater empowerment of onsite personnel so they can act more swiftly to alter efforts as dictated by local events? So why can't USAID, armed with this new OPS system designed to foster adaptive planning in the field, get any respect from Congress on an issue as fundamental to this new system as obligating by Strategic Objective?

Recommendation

USAID needs to define an explicit doctrine for the new OPS system that, in layman's terms, explains the system's central tenets of adaptive planning and demand-led funding below the level of the mission's Strategic Objectives. This doctrine not only needs to be drilled into every USAID employee, contractor, and partner, but made the central argument in USAID management's negotiations with Congress on the question of funding by Strategic Objective and not below. Otherwise, the fat lady may well be singing as far as Results-Oriented Operations Reengineering is concerned.

Moreover, a serious and agency-wide assessment needs to be undertaken on the manner in which decision-making authority has actually been delegated under the new system. Anecdotal evidence from a wide variety of sources indicates that, in many instances, the new system has led to even more steps in the review and approval process than in the past. A true atmosphere of adaptive planning in the field requires minimizing layers of bureaucratic oversight. If USAID-Washington shows such little trust in its own people in the field, how can it expect any better from Congress?

Issue 4—The dark side of any reengineering revolution: The bureaucratic paths of least resistance

Observation

It is said that all revolutions carry within them the seeds of their own potential destruction—if not in their design or planning, then often in the habits and tendencies of their human masters. The jury is still out on whether the new OPS system was designed well enough to accomplish all the lofty institutional and operational goals to which it aspires, but as for the defendant known as human nature, it's best to assume guilty until proven innocent. It is no secret that the dark side of any attempted institutional reengineering lies in the tendencies of personnel to take the bureaucratic paths of least resistance when it comes to implementing changes, i.e., insufficient follow-through on the revolutionary rhetoric and plans.

This bureaucratic path of least resistance can be seen in myriad collective passive-aggressive responses, all of which lead the institution to that suboptimal outcome known colloquially as "new wine in old bottles." In short, when faced with the prospect of having to change their behavior due to the handing down from on high of new policies, regulations, tools, and so on, many personnel will simply choose to fit these new instruments within their old universe of habits rather than alter those habits to embrace the new instruments.[4]

The biggest and most prevalent example of this behavior in the new OPS system is the growing perception that the Results Framework is nothing more than some merging of old planning

[4]In the 1930s, when the U.S. Army cavalry was ordered to motorize, its first response was to purchase motorized vans to transport the horses.

frameworks (Objective Trees and Logframe). At the start of ROOR, it seemed apparent to many within USAID and, frankly, most on the outside, that neither the Objective Trees nor Logframe was doing the job. In fact, if these two centerpieces of USAID planning were not dysfunctional to some significant degree, why reengineer the entire planning system? When the Results Framework paradigm was originally introduced, few championing the idea would have stooped to calling it merely the combination of two planning tools just declared inadequate for the agency's needs, and yet, less than two years later this "revolutionary" instrument of the RF is touted—reassuringly—by some in top management as nothing more frightening—and one must assume, challenging—than a merger of these two down-but-not-out planning instruments.[5]

Analogous discussion

It is a profoundly revolutionary challenge for USAID to switch quickly from its old supply-led planning system, where adaptive planning was rare, to one in which funding flows not only according to local demand but is subject to rapid and consistent adaptive planning. This shift forces, in naval lingo, a "sea change" of perspective and thinking. No matter how dramatic any institutional revolution, rank-and-file personnel are often faced with the reality that everything can't be changed at once—every process, every tool, every regulation. In short, a certain amount of adapting the old to the new is inevitable, but having the persistent follow-through on the core of the revolutionary change is essential for any institutional transformation to become real and sustainable. Otherwise, what's the point?

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[5] A recent "Questions and Answers" report issued by Subject Matter Experts at USAID/W and sent out on the RFNET did indeed encourage USAID personnel to think of the RF as a combination of the old Objective Tree and Logframe. In the report, the question cited was, "What is different about the Results Framework in the new system vis a vis the Objective Tree?" Part of the lengthy response included the following statement, "Some might think of it [Results Framework] as the *merging* of the Logframe and the Objective Tree (emphasis mine)." A quote taken out of context? Perhaps. But it is hard to see how such an offered interpretation does anything to further adherence to the new OPS system. In fact, one could easily argue that such an interpretation only encourages opponents of the new system to "wait it out."

The U.S. Navy faced a similarly daunting "sea change" in perspective following the end of the Cold War. During its decades-long rivalry with the Soviet Navy, the U.S. Navy defined its core mission as sea control, i.e., the ability to hold and defend large portions of the high seas in such a way as to ensure the integrity of this country's "sea lines of communication" with allies around the world. With the demise of the Soviet threat, and soon thereafter the horrendous decline of the Soviet Navy itself, the U.S. Navy found itself unchallengeable on the high seas. In effect, its core mission had been obviated by the end of the superpower rivalry. Faced with the prospect of irrelevancy within U.S. warfighting doctrine (and feeling that it should have been more in charge of its own operations during Operation Desert Storm), the U.S. Navy essentially reengineered itself for more concentrated, close-to-land types of conflicts in the post-Cold War era. That meant shifting from a focus on sea control to one of "influencing events on land." Instead of concentrating on destroying opposing navies on the high seas, the U.S. Navy now concentrates on joining with the other armed services to achieve synergized "battlespace dominance" in the littoral area (i.e., the area where land and oceans meet).

Because most naval vessels are inherently multipurpose in nature, this "sea change" in perspective meant that the Navy would have to operate its platforms in radically different ways, and especially in coordination with U.S. land and air forces. Still, some naval vessels, such as attack submarines, owed much of their design, function, and certainly their gross numbers to the old Soviet threat. For the submarine community, this shift to a littoral focus was viewed by many as tantamount to bureaucratic suicide. But they fought back, and much of the reasoning they've used in their arguments employs serious distortions of the logic of this new naval littoral doctrine. For example, for decades the submarine community celebrated its status as the ultimate stealthy naval platform, i.e., it could remain hidden from the enemy. Now, taking the bureaucratic path of least resistance, the submarine community touts as one of its primary functions the provision of naval "presence" around the globe. In short, what was once the navy's ultimate stealth platform now tries to market itself as an effective provider of visible "presence" for crisis-response operations in littoral waters. Sound Orwellian? To many, it is. Sound any more hypocritical than calling a Results Framework nothing more than the Frankenstein-like joining of the Objective Tree and Logframe?

So, will the Navy get rid of submarines, even if it took its revolutionary new doctrine to its obvious conclusions? Not a chance. The U.S. Navy has a tremendous sunk cost in the substantial capability of submarines, even if they seem of lesser combat value in this immediate era. Times can and always do change, so hedging against uncertainty usually makes sense. And, no doubt, much of the same thinking drives USAID management to portray the RF as some not-too-painful evolution from previously dominant planning instruments. After all, USAID still has to "answer the mail" during all this revolutionary change, and casually tossing out well-established capabilities can be opposed, in good faith, as the equivalent of "tossing out the baby with the bath water." On the other hand, USAID operates *now,* toward results, rather than hanging around for some unforeseen war, and to a large extent, this is where the analogy begins to break down (i.e., there are no submarine equivalents in USAID's world).

So where's the middle ground here? Where do you draw the line between "change for change's sake" and "throwing in the towel" too early on this revolution?

Recommendation

USAID has already established a reasonable timetable for institutional change (which can be thought of as a trial period for an aggressive, no-holds-barred, no-backtracking-allowed pursuit of the new OPS system): the projected lifetime of the Results Framework, or 5 to 8 years. For at least a minimum of 5 years then, this new OPS system must be carried to its logical conclusions, with both management and rank-and-file employees resisting the bureaucratic paths of least resistance—the most egregious being the tendency to interpret the RF as only a grab-bag redux of old planning instruments. This is not to say that USAID should not try to adapt these old planning tools to the new system, because anything else would be foolhardy within the current budgetary climate. However, the key idea here is adapting the old to the new and not vice versa. A subtle difference perhaps, but one that lays the burden of proof on those who focus on that which remains the same (i.e., the reality of many "old bottles") vice those who concentrate on what is truly revolutionary and new.

Issue 5—Are we there yet?: The never-ending story known as reengineering

Observation

Institutionalizing a revolution as profound as USAID's new OPS system is like owning a house--your list of "things to do" never quite gets down to zero. Reengineering a bureaucracy as large and as mature as USAID is not something you can complete with a task force, or even many task forces issuing reports upon reports. Nor is it finished by a cascade of training experiences, a parade of consultants, or even the publication of the snazziest of electronic handbooks. Reengineering is made real only by doing that thing you do—over and over again as you progressively take on board new aspects of the reengineered system and test them against the same harsh realities that sent you to the drawing board in the first place. All the reengineering work done up to now within USAID is the equivalent of "bringing the horse to water." Reengineering as a process created by "them" is never going to get this horse to drink. Only the rank-and-file personnel in the field can finish off process.

So the questions, "Are we there yet?" "Aren't we finished with all this reengineering stuff?" and so on essentially miss the point. As does any rush to define "best practices." You can't give out advice on parenting until you've had the chance to raise a couple of children (and probably get one into college). Likewise, you can't start definitively citing the do's and don'ts of Results Frameworks until you've managed to get a few to maturity, and USAID won't reach that point until a year or so into the next century.

But if missions need guidelines to sort through what's needed and what's not in this new OPS system, shouldn't USAID/W be doing everything it can to identify best practices and spread that word? There's more harm than good to be found in any rushed effort. The new OPS system was purposely designed to move USAID away from a mode of thought that said "the more control the better." Too much control gets you central planning. It gets you supply-led planning. It gets you

solutions looking for problems. It gets you 100 Toyotas on the dock and people trying to figure out what should be done with them.

Instead, the new OPS system is designed to force the agency to embrace more uncertainty in its planning, to act more like a business trying to capitalize on marketing opportunities as they arise in host countries, to listen more closely to its local customers. It would be nice if someone could come up with hard and fast rules on how to do this right from the start, but doesn't that sound a bit counter-intuitive given the goals? Sort of like some business guru's book telling you to "always plan for the unexpected!" ("But if I could plan for it, it wouldn't be unexpected!").

Another type of danger lurks in the too-fast gleaning of experience from the field. Remember, the new OPS system forces a huge change in operating perspective from supply-led to demand-led thinking, and with any perspective change that profound, early implementation is likely to yield more bad examples than good. That's just human nature. For example, a recent informal polling of Chiefs of Party (COP) of a large USAID contracting firm indicated that only a handful of these five dozen COPs were actually invited to join SO Teams—this despite core values of partnership and empowerment and a proposed Results Framework methodology that stresses accounting for the activities and contributions of USAID collaborators. And yet, if one weren't careful, would not this seemingly closed-door definition of an SO Team soon be enshrined as an agency best practice?

Analogous discussion

When the U.S. Navy finally decided to reengineer itself following the end of the Cold War, its rank-and-file membership was nonetheless deeply divided over how thorough such an effort should ever hope to be. Many were convinced that all this talk about a "new Navy" was simply a knee-jerk reaction to the general public clamoring for a "peace dividend," and therefore something that would blow over with time. Others said it was just due to pressure from Congress and the drive to reduce the deficit; so, while the Navy might suffer in the 1990s, there was always a good chance it would rebound, funding-wise, once this deficit-mania was satisfied (especially since the Defense Department budget always seemed to rise and fall in cycles during the Cold War era). Fortunately, however, there was a strong core group within the Navy who

acknowledged that a Rubicon had been crossed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and that the U.S. Navy would either quickly adapt to whatever the new reality was or risk withering on the vine.

But even within this core group of believers, there were many who didn't understand how long such a profound transformation in thinking would take. Hastily, a group of the Navy and Marine Corps' "best and brightest" were assembled and "locked" into a large conference room for many weeks (along with a couple of civilian advisers, including the author). Their orders? Don't come out until you have a new naval post-Cold War vision. About five months later, this group did emerge with that vision, which subsequently found expression as arguably the most seminal Department of Navy White Paper issued since World War II. And at that point, many in this core group of believers thought they had this battle licked. "After all," they noted, "haven't we just declared our new operating philosophy for all the world to see?"

That was the spring of 1992. However, the institutional make-over started by that White Paper, *...From the Sea,* is anything but over. In many ways, all *...From the Sea* did was to restart a long-running argument within the Department of the Navy simply by posing an alternative to the mode of doctrinal thinking that had been predominant since WWII, i.e., proposing a littoral operational focus versus the old standby known as "sea control." Although the new gospel of the littoral focus is officially stamped onto the brain of every sailor and Marine serving today, make no mistake about it, the new vision has yet to win each and every heart. Some of this internal conflict is clearly generational and will dispel with time, but most of it stems from the honest efforts of the Department of the Navy to solidify a new and untested base of operational knowledge concerning the littoral strategy—and that simply takes time and training.

Are there still instances when the Navy and Marine Corps lose their grip on that new strategy and resort reflexively to old favorite arguments in their never-ending pleas to Congress for funding? Definitely. But the keys here are: (1) a continuing leadership cadre that is committed to following through on this new vision; (2) sufficient autonomy for commanders in the field to test out this new vision year-in and year-out; and (3) the slow and steady construction of naval doctrine over time by an institution created solely as a result of this new vision—the Naval Doctrine Command, which was meant to gather the experience, not create something out of whole cloth.

Although it may seem unbelievable, the U.S. Navy never had an institution dedicated to the review and generation of naval doctrine prior to this recent reengineering effort. But the naval leadership well understood the risks of not empowering an institution to watch over the implementation process from a detached and objective perch. Nor was this organization in any hurry to grind out its version of best practices. The first "capstone" document did not appear until a full two years after the White Paper was written. As this document's foreword proclaimed, it incorporated "the lessons of history, learned in both the flush of success and the bitterness of failure."[6] In other words, the only way naval forces could plan for their future was to understand how their experience shapes that future. The effort to reengineer naval forces for the new era could not be sprung out of a bottle like some magic potion; it had to be an ongoing learning process conducted by a learning organization.

Recommendation

USAID must avoid the temptation to declare, prematurely, victories or failures in what is necessarily an ongoing and long-term effort to institutionalize the products and plans of its recent reengineering effort. It must dramatically slow down the rush to discover best practices, and avoid enshrining any anecdotal evidence from the field too early. What a Country Experimentation Lab does is not necessarily a best practice (emphasizing the word experimentation). What the majority of missions do is not necessarily a best practice (e.g., it may be unique to the situation and an example of empowerment rather than a technique of universal applicability). That which makes an RF succeed over the course of its implementation is possibly a best practice, if the experience is widespread and repeatable, but that knowledge will take years to confirm. Mistakes are far easier to discover in the short run than best practices, and, often, discovering them has far more positive long-term impact. Remember, the phrase "trial and error" assumes failure as a front-loaded input to experience.

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[6] Foreword to Naval Warfare, Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 1994), p. i.

USAID should establish an organization dedicated to the long-term collection and analysis of doctrine-generating experiences from the field. This body cannot be Washington-centered or staffed. Its center of gravity must lie with the missions. The generation of doctrine is inherently a bottom-up process. If the organization created smacks more of a Politburo than a House of Representatives, genuine doctrine will not be generated— only directives from on high. Another way to think of this proposed organization is that it must be significantly detached from USAID's executive branch, or the Management Bureau. If the Operations Business Area Analysis effort can be thought of as the "new USAID's" Constitutional Congress, this doctrine-judging body must be something closer to a Supreme Court, or something that picks its judgments from among the best arguments that wind their way up from the local courts (read missions) around the "land." If this body enjoys no "separation of power" from the Management Bureau, it will likely be limited to rule-making as opposed to experience-judging.

USAID must create an explicit mandate for the building of knowledge within each mission. With 2- to 3-year tours for most personnel and little overlap or emphasis on what has gone on over the past 20 to 30 years, the institutional memory within missions lies primarily with Foreign Service Nationals or in USAID/W offices with responsibility for tracking change over time. Although these latter two sources of information can generate a certain amount of lessons learned, the lack of incentives for in-mission personnel creates a sort of memory "black hole" that others can work around but never bridge. There are a variety of fairly simple methods to generate this crucial data flow (e.g., entry and exit interviews, after-action reports for key events), but more important is some agency-wide mandate confirming the utility of such data collection. Every investment in the future is a drain on today's resources, but without them no payoffs accrue. A strong, field-based institutional memory within USAID is a key component to generating best practices over time.

Issue 6—Balancing between tactical and operational flexibility: The example of performance-based contracting

Note: A word on military terminology here. In the military hierarchy of goals or results, strategic refers to issues that can have significant or determining effect on the course and outcome of a war; operational refers to issues that can have significant effect on the outcome of major battles or the general course of any campaign (i.e., series of major battles); and tactical refers to issues that can affect the outcome of engagements or minor battles.

An analogy to the Results Framework would be as follows: strategic issues are those that can affect the overall course or outcome of the RF; operational issues are those that can affect the outcome of any one intermediate result or the general course of any results track (i.e., series of intermediate results); and tactical issues are those that can affect the achievement of individual tasks within results.

This section examines the tension between the operational and tactical levels (e.g., the Results Package Team and Contractors), using the example of performance-based contracting. The next section examines the tension between the strategic and operational levels (e.g., the Strategic Objective and Results Package Teams), using the example of constructing and/or altering RFs.

Observation

There is a natural tension between the desire to test causality linking individual results within the Results Framework (i.e., operational-level thinking or issues) and the need to maintain a certain amount of implementing flexibility within individual Results Packages (i.e., tactical-level thinking or issues). On the one hand, if your RP activities are under constant revision, how do you keep track of the hypothesis you thought you were proving between precursor result A and

next-order result B? But on the other hand, this is not some abstract experiment where seven successes out of ten proves a strong linkage. You don't have ten chances, and the focus of your one chance is on achieving results. So what do you do? You try your best to balance the requirements for collecting hypothesis-proving or -disproving data with getting the job done—on time and under budget if possible.

Now that sounds nice on paper, all neatly packaged in one smooth paragraph, but what about a particularly tough real-world example like performance-based contracting? Here is a tricky splitting of responsibility between those who must choose the result to be achieved (i.e., the RP Team thinking on the operational level) and those on the hook for achieving it (i.e., the contractor thinking on the tactical level), and no matter how much flexibility you afford the contractor, there is still room for a clash of interests to develop.

Performance-based contracting requires extending a good deal of operational freedom of action to a contractor in terms of methods, but what happens when that freedom of action opens up doors not anticipated in the results delineated in the contract, and locked in? A clash of interests between contractor and the RP Team may well result. In short, the question is what happens when performance-based contracting severs the bond between operational goals (i.e., the RP Team working to achieve the next higher-order result) and tactical goals (that one contractor trying to achieve one result within the Results Package)?

Impossible you say? Try this one on for size: An RP Team contracts with a partnering contractor to have a bridge built across a river. The PBC agreement locks the contractor into the result of the bridge, but allows it great freedom of action in its implementation. The contractor takes that freedom, tests a few ideas along the way, and discovers a bridge is not the way to go. Instead, a far more reliable, flexible, and cheaper alternative is a ferry service. It's simple. It's sweet. It even generates a nice long-term stream of income for somebody. What it doesn't do is "pay the piper" as far as the contract goes, even though—in the big picture—it may prove a far better answer (as well as hypothesis-testing data point) as far as achieving the next-order intermediate result is concerned.

Analogous discussion

The military often runs into this same type of problem with defense contractors in designing and producing new weapon systems or platforms (former could be a pistol, the latter a ship, vehicle, or plane). For example, when you're talking about something like a new naval ship, these things are expected to have operating lives of a quarter-century or more. (Some aircraft carriers have been around for almost half a century--try thinking that far ahead in terms of changing functionality!) So what does the Navy do in situations like these?

Well, there are right ways to go about something like this and there are wrong ways. Like any big bureaucracy, the Navy provides fewer examples of the former than the latter, but let's just talk about two with particular relevance to USAID's new OPS system.

First, the bad example. The Department of Defense has established a milestone system through which the Navy must proceed before it can put a new system into production. The Navy has to get the concept agreed upon with some recognition of cost-effectiveness (remembering that it is the synergistic hyphen in "cost-effectiveness" that is important), prove the concept will work via research and development, and show how it will fit in the overall program before it goes into production. This could take years and a lot of money, neither of which USAID has when constructing Results Frameworks, but it's the inclusive and comprehensive process here that's illuminating, not the scale. In this planning process, the Navy gets everybody engaged, including the competing and then the winning contractors, and it leaves no stone unturned in terms of options. Yet, despite this milestone system, it is still hard for the Defense Department to discipline the Navy into accepting the series of decisions generated by the process. The world and the threat changes, the Navy frets over having everything seemingly staked in that one system, the technologists are always coming up with something better, and so the Navy is tempted to fiddle with the program when it is under way, always in the hope of "making it better."

This is "adaptive planning" at its worst. In the end, the Navy still gets the system and on time, but the cost soars. In Defense, we always pay those costs, but in USAID, the money isn't there. No specific recommendations are garnered here, but there are some general rules-of-thumb: (1) don't fiddle with things in midstream (and inclusivity can create a lot of "cooks" for your "broth"), (2) take the time you need to plan ahead of time (think across ranges of possibilities, as we'll discuss

below in section 8), and (3) don't over-specify—not just on methodology but in terms of results, too (especially since the latter often determines much of the former).

The better example from the world of defense comes in the "open architecture" approach now pushed by all of the services with regard to platform (e.g., vehicles, aircraft, ships) development. Whereas in the past each type of platform was typically characterized by a unique array of high-tech componentry (sometimes so unique that it was hard for platforms to "talk" to one another electronically), now the services demand that contractors design and produce far more generic platforms characterized by "plug in and play" suites, into which generation after generation of high-tech hardware can be sequentially inserted and used with little or no platform redesign or refit cost. In short, contractors now have the incentive to design and produce items optimized for upgrades.

This is adaptive planning at its best, as the services get the platforms they want—again and again over time even as technology changes but the platforms remain in active service.

Recommendation

USAID should create performance-based contracts in which contractors have the incentive, not toward achievement of a point in the process, but to help the process along. In the bridge example, it means getting to the other side of the river; in the weapons platform example, it means staying up with technological improvements. In other words, avoid over-specifying results and instead lock the contractor into the goal of getting you and your overall Results Package "up and over" into the next-order intermediate result, whatever that may be. Make the contractor part owner of, as well as parts provider to, the next-order intermediate result.

Secondly, always try to build into contracts the requirement for upgrading capacity, not simply in the sense of applied technology, but also in terms of straightforward problem-solvling. In the bridge example, it means building a contract that encourages either "upgrading" (e.g., a drawbridge) or "downgrading" (the ferry service) options. You don't want either your results tracks or your overall Results Framework to suffer the sin of narrow,

linear logic (i.e., is the only path possible), so why subject your ocntractors to the same? These contractors can be a huge source of adaptive planning ideas, but only if performance-based contracting allows them to be. Bottom line: Never have a cutoff date for good ideas.[7]

[7] One caveat offered with that bottom line is that there should never be a cutoff date for good ideas *if* you have a viable program or project that has some adaptability built into it. *If* you fiddle too much *before* you start, however, you may never start or end up with a jury-rigged system. *If* you fiddle too much with the *ongoing* program, it may lose character and causality. One has to be optimistic and say, "There will always be another opportunity/program/ contract," do the best with the present one, and incorporate changes into the next. I am indebted to Henry Gaffney of The CNA Corporation for this point.

Issue 7—Balancing between operational and strategic flexibility: The process of creating or altering a Results Framework

Observation

Whereas performance-based contracting provides a good example for analyzing the intersection of tactical and operational perspectives, the process of creating or altering a Results Framework illuminates the collision of operational and strategic viewpoints. The RF can be thought of as a relatively soft and flexible latticework of hypotheses, within which is embedded a certain number of real-world "hard reality" results that act as concrete anchor points for the RF's structure. If the RF is designed flexibly enough, the loss of any one result probably doesn't bring the whole structure crashing down. If not, the first time one of these hard realities breaks apart, the RF is likely to start coming apart at the seams—like some brick house where a couple of bricks crumble and all of a sudden you're looking at a big crack running down through the foundation.

So how do you avoid creating RFs that are both stiff and fragile? How do you avoid the worst outcome of an RF construction: simultaneously putting "all your eggs" into a series of RP "baskets," the demise of any one of which calls the entire RF's viability into question? How do you build into your RF construction a "get around" function, like an electric company's ability to reroute power around failed nodes during a power outage?

Analogous discussion

The military is constantly in the business of projecting long-term futures. Its personnel are paid to think about bad things looming over the horizon, because no one in this country likes the idea of someday facing some military threat for which we are totally unprepared. So, like an insurance

company, the military spends a lot of planning time thinking ahead to all sorts of things that could go wrong (or, occasionally, right) in ways that could alter our nation's national security requirements. But because no one in this country likes the idea that we're unnecessarily wasting a lot of money preparing for all sorts of conflicts that will never occur, the military must relate all this strategic futures forecasting to real-world operations and/or tactics that employ the assets they actually have (or will have) on hand—hence, the analogy to the Results Framework.

First, think of all the weapon systems and weapon platforms as so many "hard reality" results lodged within an array of intermediate results known collectively as research & development/acquisitions. Then think of some grand projection of the "future threat" that extends, time-wise, to the year 2020 as the Results Framework. The idea here would then be that you want to have these results tracks of R&D and acquisitions of weapon systems and platforms all come together in time to meet the generic or aggregate threat projected for the endpoint in question (here, a quarter-century down the road). Simply put, the Strategic Objective is meeting that over-the-horizon threat with some time and capacity to spare.

Can you imagine everything that could go wrong with this picture? Technologies that end up working or not working out. Cost over-runs. New technologies constantly tempting you with alterations in the plan. The world doesn't turn out exactly as you planned. The list is almost endless. Therefore, laying your entire acquisition strategy down on top of a single template full of educated guesses might work, say, one time out of five (using a generous definition of "work" here), but the military can't work with odds like that. It's in the business of covering the odds and beating the point spreads (i.e., avoiding U.S. casualties). So how do we maintain a flexible and balanced relationship between strategic thinking (i.e., the "big plan," carved in stone) and operational temptations (i.e., the urge to alter that "big plan" incrementally as time unfolds, thereby losing the strategic perspective)? How do we trade off the concentrating focus of staying on track against the needs and dangers of "moving the goal posts" now and then?

The military's answer is called "scenario planning," whereas big business tends to call it "decision-scenarios." Scenario planning involves creating a range of scenario "paths" that run obliquely away from the horizontal time-line axis known as the conventional wisdom about the future (i.e., going from point "A" to point "A+x," with "x" being time passed). These paths can either veer off "high" (as in better, or "A+x (positive)") or "low" (as in worse, or "A+x

(negative)") in relation to that expected, straight-line assumption ("A+x") that things will remain pretty much the same way as now (in other words, "A" extended as far as the predicting eye can see). Conceptually it is pretty simple. Things could either get worse, get better, or stay the same. The trick comes in constructing the details of the scenarios, for it is within the richness of detail that the military tries to locate a realistic range of potential threats against which any one weapon system or platform might have to perform.

Why is this planning process so crucial? First, it helps to avoid that "all the eggs in one basket" thinking modality, which, when reality turns out differently, often drives decision-makers into serious self-delusion, i.e., they refuse to admit the environment isn't what they planned for and end up dealing with it in a rigid fashion that ultimately betrays all their efforts to date. Second, the range of scenarios encourages healthy debate within the ranks about the course of events (which way is it going?), as opposed to finger-pointing over who got the picture wrong. Third, by planning for ranges of outcomes rather than discrete endpoints, the military is forced to think more generically in terms of how its acquisition results tracks unfold over time. That generic thinking engenders greater flexibility, in a trickle-down fashion, among those on the hook to achieve individual results, because no one wants to get caught with a one-dimensional product or an outcome that proves useless somewhere down the road. Fourth, there is no such thing as a crystal ball, and, as far as the military is concerned, planning for the wrong future is almost the same as having no future at all.

A word of warning, though; although the military sensibly uses alternative scenarios to project future threat ranges in the development of individual weapon systems and platforms, it often abuses this system when figuring out how many of those systems or platforms they should possess for any given future point in time. They do so by creating what are known as "point scenarios," such as "country A with assumed military capabilities in year X." Typically, military planners overinflate such opposing force capabilities in the name of a safety margin, thus creating system and platform requirements that may be excessive (again, that fear of finger-pointing that follows the realization that "someone got it wrong"). Point being, scenario development is useful when done to orient the planner to situational awareness within a flow of time that can expand across a range of downstream directions. It is less useful when the planner uses that projected time flow to locate a discrete, downstream endpoint and base all strategic planning toward that

single location. In short, use scenario planning to shape process, not count up outputs. This is a tool for determining quality, not quantity.

Recommendation

USAID should encourage, and perhaps even mandate, the use of scenario planning for Results Frameworks. Rather than nailing the mission down to a single RF that is logically going to have to be reconfigured every year (not something bureaucracies are good at encouraging or rewarding employees for), encourage missions to think across (and present) a range of RF "paths" or structures. This approach will make it easier for missions both to spot and to own up to planning "mistakes" made by eliminating the requirement for strictly linear logic (i.e., you plan in the potential for orthogonal developments). This would help USAID become a better learning organization by reducing employees' perception of risk exposure ("What if I'm wrong here? Better to fuzz the logic so I can't be") and orienting their thinking more to learning as they go ("I wonder what this new development signifies?").

This should not be thought of as necessarily a prescription for more planning and thus paperwork. The process of deciding on any one RF construction naturally entails consideration of a variety of paths. This idea is simply about not discarding all those alternatives and keeping a few in your kit bag as you head down the road of RF implementation.

Issue 8—Discerning and identifying failure in the new OPS system: One rather painless approach to testing Results Frameworks

Observation

USAID currently employs no mechanism for testing Results Frameworks created by missions in the field, other than the review of planning methodology and documentation by superior bureaucratic layers. The absence of any such testing mechanism results in significant losses of both training opportunities for mission personnel and pre- and in-implementation troubleshooting for supervising entities.

USAID missions are already neck-deep in planning and implementation duties, and the process of constructing Results Frameworks has, in general, proven to be quite long and involved—though also beneficial in building core values such as partnership and empowerment. In such a consistently busy environment with regular personnel turnover, how can USAID create safe conditions ("off-line" or "downtime") within which mission personnel can either practice or test typical decision dynamics? How can USAID missions simulate RF implementation as both a training objective and adaptive planning tool (i.e., simulating downstream RF phases)? More importantly, how might missions simulate RF implementation as a method of exposing structural weakness or poor hypothesis formulation, either prior to implementation (perhaps even as part of the RF construction process) or at periodic points over the RF's lifetime? Much like architects build small-scale or computer-based models to test their designs or design concepts, missions could attempt a form of RF modeling as a test for structural soundness.

Analogous discussion

Clearly the military possesses a great advantage over USAID on the issue of training—namely, the military is called upon to perform its basic duty on an intermittent basis. Armed with significant downtime between such activities, the military can afford a tremendous operational focus on training. Still, the military suffers many of the same personnel-rotation and location-specific training challenges as USAID. Likewise, it is constantly introducing new policies, procedures, and tactics that can benefit greatly from off-line testing (i.e., not in conditions of actual combat). Finally, like USAID, the military understands that its best and more senior field-based decision-makers (i.e., commanders) are not simply created out of thin air, but are shaped slowly over time through experience and training.

Because of its substantial downtime between actions and the amount of funding it can use for training purposes, the military engages its personnel in a broad variety of simulative training environments. Although most involve such substantial resource inputs as to rule out any useful translation to the development field, others are specifically tailored to testing planning instruments and procedures, as well as actual plans themselves. This less resource-intensive end of the training spectrum is often identified by the term "wargaming."

Wargaming can involve a variety of simulative environments: from full-blown computer modeling of complex activities to the simplest sort of pencil-and-paper seminars. Although fidelity to real-world experience varies greatly across this spectrum, one core aspect remains the same; the game is designed essentially to confront decision-makers with sequentially arranged events (also known as "scenario injects") that challenge their planning skills as they seek to implement some operational activity either predetermined or chosen by the training audience as part of game play.

The military values these gaming techniques not so much because they validate or prove new strategies or tactics in advance of their real-world application, but rather because of their capacity for invalidating or trouble-shooting those strategies and tactics. For example, when trying out new tactics in gaming exercises—for example, those involving information warfare—the military often finds that it takes numerous iterations before training audience members achieve even the most basic completion of their exercise objectives. The gaming environment typically illuminates

so many cognitive disconnects, built-in procedural snafus, and methodological fault-lines that actual completion of even the most basic application of the tactic in question requires extensive replanning and reconfiguration over a series of exercises. Much like language competency tests or product safety tests, these gaming exercises are purposely designed to stress the subjects and/or subject matter in question to such a degree as to expose either dysfunctionality or the limits of functionality. In other words, the utility of these gaming techniques is judged by the degree to which weaknesses and failures are exposed versus the confirmation of skills and successes (or "results," for that matter).

Recommendation

USAID should consider the use of seminar-based gaming exercises within individual missions as a way to test RF construction and to provide onsite personnel with valuable training in typical RF decision dynamics. This could be done either at the start of an RF's implementation or, just as usefully, at some point downstream in the achieving process.

How might something like this work? Put simply, a small group of game control personnel could pursue a temporary duty stay at a USAID mission. The first period of the stay could be spent interviewing mission personnel and in-country partners about the extant RF to generate ideas for use in the game, as well as to familiarize potential game players with the gaming methodology. The game itself would likely run over several days, with mission personnel and in-country partners either role-playing themselves or someone else in the process (the latter often proving far more illuminating). Utilizing the mission's extant RF, the game's "moves," or individual seminar sessions, would be separated or demarcated by a series of predetermined "time jumps" of, say, one or more years into the future. Thus, each move or seminar session would consist of game play by role players in response to the alteration of the local development environment depicted by the game's controllers as having transpired during the preceding time jump. Game play, in this instance, would center largely on revising the RF's construction and other adaptive planning tasks involving local partners, host government relations, and so on. Following this multi-day seminar game, additional time could be spent by the role players and the game controllers deconstructing

the game's course and outcome, as well as analyzing what the training experience says about the RF's current construction.

The idea underlying such a training experience would be the simulation of an RF's lifetime, i.e., confronting mission personnel with the artificial experience of living through the entirety of an RF and having to use adaptive planning techniques, year in and year out, to practice dealing with all the surprises fate typically has in store for them over a 5- to 8-year implementation period. Each seminar session, then, essentially consists of role players being thrust a year or so into the future and having to deal with all the good and bad things that transpired since their last RF "move." The trick for the game controllers is to inject just enough troubling scenarios to force the role players into considering a plausible range of downstream consequences of their RF game play, while not rendering that game play so difficult as to strain the players' credulity (known in game parlance as "losing game transparency").

Some sectors of private business around the world are looking to the military's gaming techniques as a relatively inexpensive and safe way to test new ideas, policies, and strategies. USAID could well find such techniques to be a good fit with field missions looking to test their RF structures and provide more dynamic training opportunities for their personnel and in-country partners.

Issue 9—The role of partners in the new OPS system: Empowerment without enough training creates a showstopping problem

Observation

USAID's new OPS system clearly empowers development partners throughout the planning and achieving phases. Once the mission makes a grant to a contracting agency, its capacity for day-to-day oversight over that agency's implementation is small. This is part and parcel of the new performance-based contracting system that focuses on results and empowers the executors to follow whatever gets those results.

Naturally, the PBC system places a premium on USAID's up-front training of partner organizations and personnel in the ways of the new OPS system. If partners are not sufficiently trained and don't understand the critical nuances of the new adaptive planning philosophy (versus the old, now discredited, supply-led planning logic), the new OPS system is likely to suffer great dysfunctionality in implementation. In short, a deficiency in training partners is likely to degenerate into a "showstopping" problem for the entire new OPS system.

There are widespread complaints from regular USAID contractors that they are undertrained in the new OPS system and do not understand its workings well enough to engage in PBC realistically. Moreover, as reported informally by several Chiefs of Party (associated with a large contracting firm) to USAID personnel during a recent exchange, their personnel in the field perceive, with great concern, that their current long-range planning efforts are largely divorced from those of local mission SO Teams, primarily because the COPs see their local organizations as being significantly "out of the loop" on mission planning as presently implemented under the new OPS system. To the extent that such complaints and warnings are both accurate and

representative of larger realities, USAID missions' current implementation of the new OPS system risks negative outcomes and soured partner relationships in the coming months and years.

Analogous discussion

The U.S. Navy consists of ships—highly discrete units with a captain in complete charge. As an institution, therefore, the U.S. Navy tends to prefer self-sufficiency. U.S. naval forces would prefer to have both the resources and the authority necessary to handle overseas interventions without relying on support from others over which it has no control. Having to account in advance for the potential contributions of others is always a tricky matter when it comes to crisis-response planning. In the main this is true because the actual crisis unfolds in ways that render many of those assumed contributions less (or conversely, more) than anticipated (we just tend to remember the "less" cases more). Then there are those who show up unexpectedly—some with sufficient resources and others without. In short, the U.S. Navy often encounters the following operational challenge when responding to a regional crisis: you can just never be sure who's coming to the coalition until you arrive on scene and see what you've been given to work with.

Faced with that sort of messy potential, especially one that unfolds at a moment's notice following the eruption of some regional crisis, the U.S. Navy takes great pains during its peacetime interactions with partner navies around the world to pursue as much joint training as possible. This training takes a lot of effort and substantial resources, but it is a must for the Navy because, in this era, the U.S. public mandates its armed forces seek, wherever possible, to avoid having to "go it alone," and that means a policy of accepting "all comers" in most overseas operations.

To its credit, the Navy has developed and pursued a reasonable and farsighted policy regarding joint training with partner navies around the globe. In short, the U.S. Navy sees itself as the "hub" of any international naval coalition, with that large number of potential partner navies as interchangeable "spokes" ready for rapid insertion and coordinated operations. Much like the idea of "open architecture" in current ship design (i.e., creating more generic ship hull "shells" that feature component "suites" that allow for an easy "plug in and play" capability for high-tech equipment), the hubs-spokes vision revolves around optimizing both the U.S. and partner navies

along the logic of "plug in and play" capabilities. In other words, the focus of the joint training is on "interoperability," or the capacity for individual navies' assets to come together in communications and operations as seamlessly as possible—again, with the U.S. Navy's unparalleled assets playing the "hub" role to the allied "spokes."

For the U.S. Navy to leverage the contributions of allied navies for maximum effect in any one operation, peacetime joint training must serve as the "wickets" through which any potential partner navy must pass and thereby prove its capabilities. Simply put, proof of partnering skills comes up front or there is no partnering.

As part of this "hub-spokes" vision, the U.S. Navy publishes generic procedural guidelines for potential partners and regular training partners. These publications spell out in great detail what skills and assets are required to perform joint operations with the U.S. Navy across its entire operational spectrum.

The U.S. Navy's never-ceasing efforts to nurture joint operational ties with foreign navies reflects its realistic attitude about the training challenge created by its "hub-and-spokes" vision of coalition operations—if you want to be the "hub," you either "put up" in terms of training partners or "shut up" about playing leader.

Recommendation

USAID cannot skimp on its responsibility to train partner organizations. At a minimum, the resources and effort devoted to training partner organizations must match the new OPS system's rhetoric concerning empowerment. As any management guru will tell you, training is always the first thing to feel the axe of budget-cutters, even though it routinely provides the greatest return on the dollar spent. Much like skimping on preventive maintenance with a new car, USAID might find that its new OPS system can get by with minimal training of partners in the short term. But if the new OPS system was designed and is being implemented "for the long haul," anything less than an aggressive and pervasive focus on training will be the single, most self-destructive "bureaucratic path of least resistance" that USAID can choose in the coming months and years.